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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the effects of question type (multiple-choice, wh-questions, and cloze items) and question preview on assessment of English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) listening comprehension. Subjects were 90 freshmen at a Chinese university, randomly assigned to two groups. One was administered a question preview before listening to a passage; the other was not. All subjects answered the three question types after hearing the passage. Results indicated that the subjects had better listening performance when answering multiple-choice questions than when answering wh-questions or cloze items. Also, question preview appears to have facilitated listening performance. Additional listening comprehension testing techniques are suggested, including use of question types with nonverbal response, having students read questions before the test begins, and designing test questions according to students' listening proficiency. (Contains 2 tables and 12 references.) (MSE)

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The Effects of Question Type and Preview on EFL Listening Assessment

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The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effects of question type and question preview on the assessment of the EFL listening comprehension of college freshmen in Taiwan. The major research questions explored in the study were: (1) Did EFL learners have different listening test performances on different question types? (2) Did question preview influence EFL learners' performance on listening test? This study examined how three question types (multiple-choice questions, wh-questions, cloze test) and question preview (with /without) influence EFL learners' performance on listening assessment. Subjects, 90 freshmen at National Yunlin University of Science & Technology, were randomly assigned to two experimental groups by cluster sampling. For the group with question preview, subjects read the test questions before listening to the passage. As for the other group without question preview, subjects read the questions after hearing the passage. All subjects answered the three types of test questions after listening to the passage. Results indicated that subjects had better listening test perfomance when answering multiple-choice questions than answering wh-questions or cloze test. Besides, question preview was found to have a facilitating effect on subjects' listening performance. Finally, the current study proposed several suggestions for the assessment of listening comprehension, including: using question types with non-verbal response; having students read questions before the test begins; and designing test questions according to students' listening proficiency.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the receptive skill of listening has become the basis for second language (L2) acquisition in comprehension-based methodologies and approaches. As the importance of listening has emerged, tests of L2 listening ability are very common in language education. However, there is no generally accepted theoretical basis on which to construct L2 listening tests. It seems that test designers often follow their instincts and just do the best they can when developing tests of L2 listening comprehension. With the extensive use of L2 listening tests, there is an urgent need for research into the best ways of constructing the tests.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate how question type and question preview influence the performance on EFL listening comprehension tests taken by college students in Taiwan. The major research questions explored in the study were (1) Did EFL learners have different listening test performances on different question types? (2) Did question preview influence EFL learners'

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performance on listening test? (3) Is there any relationship between test taker' listening proficiency and their performance on EFL listening tests under the effects of question type and preview?

Shohamy & Inbar (1991) indicated while extensive research has been directed at reading comprehension tests, listening tests tend to be neglected. Some researchers also have complained about the lack of research and theory specific to the testing of L2 listening comprehension (Powers, 1986; Lund, 1990; Buck, 1990, 1991). Furthermore, Brown & Yule (1983) pointed that basic research on L2 listening comprehension tests was urgently required before any current methods of assessment could be regarded as appropriate diagnostic instruments. By providing empirical evidence, the present study seeks to contribute to our understanding of the effects of question type and preview on assessing L2 listening comprehension.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For the past decade, there has been little research literature involving the investigation of foreign language listening test. Among these studies, De Jong (1987), McNamara (1991), and Buck (1992) looked at the validity of listening comprehension test. With the Rasch model based on Item Response Theory (IRT), De Jong (1987) analyzed French and German listening tests used in Netherlands. He proposed that literal understanding of oral text is preferable to interpretative understanding as the underlying trait of tests for FL listening comprehension. A study of McNamara (1991) also employed Rasch IRT in the analysis of data from an ESP listening test for Australian health professionals. He concluded that it is possible to construct a single dimension using the items on the test for the listening ability of health professional contexts. Moreover, Buck (1992) adopted the multitrait-multimethod (MTMM) methodology to examine the construct validity of the listening test taken by Japanese EFL college students. It is suggested that listening comprehension is a separate and separable trait in L2 ability, and that listening comprehension tests should include as many of the characteristics of the "normal" listening situation as is reasonably possible.

From the review of research literature, several studies are found to be directly related to the present study. First, Buck (1991) used the verbal report methodology to investigate how listening tests work, and how processes not normally accessible

through quantitative research methods influence test performance. The testees were six female Japanese university students living in Britain. Results showed that question preview influenced subjects' performance in the EFL listening comprehension test. A study by Shohamy & Inbar (1991) examined the effects of both text and question types on EFL learners' scores on listening comprehension tests. The text types included newsbroadcast, a lecturette, and a dialogue. The questions were classified into global, local, and trivial types. Results showed that subjects performed better on the more 'listenable' texts and on items referring to local cues. Besides, Berne (1992) considered whether FL listening comprehension varied according to text type and assessment task. Text types included lecture and interview, and assessment tasks consisted of multiple choice, listening cloze, and open-ended questions. She found no significant effect for text type and that subjects got the highest scores on multiple choice. Finally, Eykyn (1992) studied the impact of four tasks on the recall protocol of novice high school French learners while watching authentic video material. The tasks were multiple choice, choose-a-picture, French to English vocabulary lists, and wh-questions. Results indicated that subjects produced protocols with more idea units when working with multiple choice than with wh-questions.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects in the present study were 90 students from the freshmen at National Yunlin University of Science & Technology in Taiwan. Having learned English as a foreign language for about six years in school, they have approximately a low-intermediate level of EFL. Subjects' listening proficiency was based on their grades on the first semester freshmen course *English Listening Practice*.

Instruments

The listening material used in the current study was a radio interview from *Interchange* (Richards, 1991). The interview including about 350 words talked about the life of an American actor, James Dean. The interview is approximately

three minutes long and recorded by native speakers of English. The three question types in the study consisted of multiple-choice questions, cloze test, and wh-questions. Each question type included ten items.

Procedures

Subjects were randomly assigned to the two experimental groups by cluster sampling. For the group with question preview, subjects read test questions before listening to the material. As for the other group without question preview, subjects read questions after hearing the material. Before the experiment began, subjects were told in detail what they were required to do in the study. They first listened to the interview twice, and then answered the test questions. In order to counterbalance the learning effect of the three question types, they were put in six combinations by order for both groups.

Data Analysis

For the scoring of multiple choice, cloze test and wh-questions, one point was given for answering each question or item correctly. So the total scores of each question types were ten points. Subjects' listening proficiency as represented by their grades on *English Listening Practice* ranged from 0 to 100. ANCOVA and follow-up T-test, were conducted to analyze subjects' scores on the three question types.

RESULTS

The main intent of the present study was to examine the effects of question type and question preview on the assessment of the EFL listening comprehension of college freshmen in Taiwan. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of subjects' scores on the EFL listening test. For the three question types, subjects had the highest average score on multiple-choice questions and the lowest scores on cloze test.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Subjects' Listening Test Scores

Question Type \ Question Preview	With (N=45)		Without (N=45)		Total (N=90)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Multiple-Choice Question	6.36	1.79	5.47	1.52	5.91	1.71
Wh-Question	3.18	2.11	2.78	2.44	2.98	2.28
Cloze Test	2.62	2.08	1.60	1.85	2.11	2.02
Total	4.05	1.99	3.28	1.94	3.67	2.00

A statistical test of ANCOVA was conducted to further investigate whether there was significant difference in subjects' performance on EFL listening test between different conditions of question preview and text type. Table 2 indicates the significant effect of question preview on subjects' test performance. That is,. subjects in the groups with question preview had significantly higher average scores than did subjects in the groups without question preview. Moreover, question type had a significant effect on subjects' performance. Follow-up t-tests indicated that subjects' average scores on multiple-choice questions were significantly higher than on wh-questions or cloze test. Subjects' scores on wh-questions were also significantly higher than on cloze test. Besides, the covariate, i.e., subjects' listening proficiency based on their grades in the course *English Listening Practice* influenced subjects' test performance significantly.

Table 2. ANCOVA Test for Subjects' Listening Test Scores

SV		SS	df	MS	F
Between					
Listening Proficiency	(A)	90.80	1	90.80	14.67**
Question Preview	(B)	35.34	1	35.34	5.71*
Interaction	(AB)	2.23	1	2.23	0.36
Error	(E)	538.48	87	6.19	
Within					
Question Type	(C)	33.21	2	16.60	7.10**
Interaction	(AC)	5.10	2	2.55	1.09
Interaction	(BC)	4.90	2	2.45	1.05
Error (1)	(E)	406.87	174	2.34	

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$

DISCUSSION

In the present study, after listening to the material subjects answered multiple-choice questions, cloze test, and wh-questions. Results show that subjects got significantly higher scores on multiple-choice questions than on the other two testing methods. It is suggested that Taiwanese college freshmen performed differently on various question types for assessing EFL listening comprehension. The results support Berne's (1992) and Eykyn's (1992) which revealed that L2 listeners performed better on multiple-choice questions than other question types.

This finding is related to the nature of response task required by each question type. Among the four language skills, listening and reading belong to comprehension skills; speaking and writing are production skills. According to Rost (1990), a listening test of high reliability should only assess test takers' ability of listening comprehension, not involving the assessment of writing or speaking abilities. For the three question types examined in the study, only multiple-choice question employs non-verbal response task to evaluate subjects' listening ability. The other two types, cloze test and wh-questions, assess not only subjects' listening ability but also their writing ability by requiring verbal response. As a result, cloze test and wh-questions are more complex and difficult to answer than multiple-choice questions.

Furthermore, results demonstrate that subjects got significantly higher scores on wh-questions than on cloze test. According to Chaudron's scheme (1985) which estimates the relationship of testing input to the cognitive operations the test-taker must perform, wh-questions and cloze both need more written ability, but the former requires more degree of understanding than the latter. The different finding in the current study may be explained by the following two reasons. The first reason is that cloze appears for more frequently in reading test than in listening test. Thus, subjects feel more familiar and accustomed to answer wh-questions than cloze test. Next, the cloze test used in the study appears in the form of summary instead of fragment from the original script. The difficulty in answering such form of cloze has also increased.

Finally, results of the present study show that question preview has a significant main effect on subjects' performance in EFL listening test. This finding supports Buck's (1991) which proposed that question preview did influence listening strategies, the degree of comprehension, and test difficulty. The result also confirms the effect

of schemata on L2 listening comprehension. Question preview can stimulate the testee's prior or background knowledge to expect the incoming test material.

CONCLUDSIONS

The present study can provide several suggestions for the assessment of EFL listening comprehension. First, results show that subjects' scores on multiple-choice questions were significantly higher than those on cloze test and wh-questions. It is suggested that EFL listening test should try to avoid the verbal response task. Thus, those appropriate testing methods can include true/false, recognition, match, choosing picture, multiple-choice, or even physical response. This consideration is especially important to beginner or intermediate L2 learners who are less proficient in writing skill. Of course, the evaluation of writing skill can be included when test takers are advanced learners or the test intends to assess dictation ability.

In addition, findings reveal the facilitating effect of question preview on performance in EFL listening test. When taking a listening comprehension test, EFL learners should be provided with opportunities to read test questions first before they listen to the tape. Thus, they can identify in advance the objectives of the listening task and main points of the test material. As soon as the tape of test material is played, testees will not get confused and can know what to listen for. Furthermore, in order not to increase test difficulty, questions had better be printed on the test paper instead of being read on the tape. This is especially important for testees of beginning and low-intermediate proficiency.

Finally, results indicate that subjects' EFL listening proficiency is significantly related to their test performance on the three testing methods. That is, more proficient EFL listeners perform better than less proficient listeners no matter what the testing method is. Therefore, when designing a listening test, EFL teachers should develop questions which match students' listening proficiency. Only with appropriate question difficulty can the listening test evaluate students' listening ability validly and reliably.

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